

GOOD FOOD POLICY AND A NATIONAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM. WHAT ARE THE LINKS?

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Food Secure Canada's 9th National Assembly, Toronto, October 14th, 2016

Our starting points

- “Food is a cultural, social, educational and aesthetic experience, as well as a necessity for good health.” – Peter Moss.
- Good meals are an essential part of good early learning and care.
- Good food policy should be part of good child care policy.



Current policy context



- There is no national child care policy or system.
- Child care is a market.
- There are regulated spaces for only a quarter of children in Canada aged 0-5 years and high fees generally limit access further
- Provincial/territorial licensing regulations lay out requirements for food provision in regulated child care programs.

Provincial/territorial context

- Generally, minimal food and nutrition requirements.
- Five provinces require child care centres to provide meals and snacks: NL, NS, NB, ON & SK.
- Eight provinces and territories do not require meals to be provided: PE, QC, MB, AB, BC, NT, YT & NU. (Children bring lunchboxes.)



Provincial/territorial context con't.



- A few provinces require menus to be posted.
- Even the provinces that do require centres to provide meals, do *not* require them to be prepared on site.
- Generally, PT's require centres to "follow the Canada Food Guide" when food is provided.

As a result...

- There is great variation in the food and meal experiences provided in licensed child care programs.
 - Some provide meals on-site
 - Some require parents to send boxed lunches.
- Some programs have on-site kitchens and cooks on staff to prepare meals. Others use outside catering.



Despite this context



- Some programs provide excellent food and meal experiences.
- Good child care programs view food and meals as part of the pedagogical process not separate from it.
- Growing food, preparing it, sharing it and enjoying it are integral parts of the care and education of young children.

Beyond box lunches and the *Canada Food Guide*...

- At their most rigorous, child care licensing standards specify adherence to the *Canada Food Guide* as the pinnacle of good food.
- So while good child care programs recognize the importance of growing, cooking and eating fresh, local and culturally appropriate food, this is far from the norm.
- How do we make good, healthy food **the norm** in early learning and child care?



Our political opportunity

- Federal commitment to a national early learning and child care framework.
- Four national organizations developed a **Shared Framework** laying out important principles.
- Delivered to Federal and Provincial Ministers to try and facilitate a collaborative intergovernmental process.



Shared Framework to Build an ECE System



- Founded on the assumption that ECEC is a public good and a human right, not a commodity;
- Based on the idea that equity is a core value for ECEC policy and services;
- Supported by the key principles of universality, high quality and comprehensiveness.

Reconciliation and the role of ECEC

- The Truth and Reconciliation called upon “the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.”
- An Assembly of First Nations survey found that 78% of children up to the age of five have no access to licensed child care.



Linking national child care policy and national food policy

- The People's Food Policy specifies: "Creating a nationally-funded Children and Food strategy (including school meal programs, school gardens, and food literacy programs) to ensure that all children at all times have access to the food required for healthy lives."
- Child care advocates would support this call, and expand it to include the early years.



Linking national child care policy and national food policy

- Good child care programs that already go beyond basic policy requirements can serve as models for school food programs. These programs:
 - integrate food, food systems and curriculum;
 - value the nutritional and *social* aspects of food and meal times;
 - value the *care* of children as a key part of their education.
- Good food needs to be seen as *part* of the child care system that we're aiming for. Good food policy needs to be incorporated into child care policy.

